

Intermountain Trails

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Forest In Focus: Salmon-Challis National Forest

Forest Supervisor—Chuck Mark



Salmon-Challis Forest Supervisor,
Chuck Mark

Welcome to the Salmon-Challis National Forest! We just celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act which provided the foundation to establish, “Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness” in 1980.

The “Frank Church” is the largest wilderness area in the lower 48 states and is a land of steep, rugged mountains, deep canyons, and wild, whitewater rivers.

My family and I floated the Middle Fork of the Salmon River this past summer, which is one of the most sought after wilderness, whitewater

trips in the country. The Middle Fork of the Salmon starts in the high country forests of subalpine fir, lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce and runs 104 miles through the heart of the Frank Church till its waters mingle with the Main Fork of the Salmon River. The crystal, clear waters of the Middle Fork descend from the subalpine forest into the high mountain desert into impassable, sheer-walled canyons where only Bighorn Sheep can traverse and survive. Approximately 10,000 people float the Middle Fork of the Salmon River each summer to see its wildlife, fly fish for westslope cutthroat trout or soak in its hotspots.

Another remarkable sight I witnessed this summer was the return of the spring/summer Chinook salmon to spawn in the Forest’s creeks and streams. This endangered fish swims upstream from the Pacific Ocean past dams, irrigation diversions, fishermen and through rapids and waterfalls to reach the small tributaries where these fish were born in order to spawn. The Salmon-Challis NF is home to some of the few wild salmon spawning runs left in the State of Idaho. I saw these wild Chinook salmon spawning in Camas Creek in August; it was truly a remarkable sight to behold. These salmon travel 750 miles to reach Camas Creek to complete their cycle of life.

The Salmon-Challis NF is a landscape of vast diversity, incredible scenery, which includes abundant wildlife, fish and bird species which you can experience while pursuing your favorite recreation activity. Come and enjoy the Salmon-Challis

TRAIL STORIES

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The Historic Horse Creek Trail -see page 2



The Historic Horse Creek Trail

The Historic Horse Creek Trail is located in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

The trail was built by the CCC in the early 30s as a supply line for the Square Top and Oreana lookouts and the privately owned Gattin Ranch. This Mainline trail, while only 15 miles in length is one of the more difficult trails to maintain due to its location in the bottom of a steep rocky canyon. The trail is plagued by large rock slides and avalanches. In the spring, high water and log jams in Horse Creek causes water to cover the trail.

The massive 347,000 acre 2012 Mustang Fire Complex exacerbated these problems by reducing vegetative cover, contributing to increased runoff and floating debris. Starting the year after the fire, the Forest took on the task of reopening the trail which had not been passible for over six years. Over the last two years multiple entries have been made into the drainage to perform trail work. The Forest partnered with the Montana Conservation Corps who along with FS crews invested 1000s of hours of hard labor in the reconstruction of the trail. FS and MCC crews moved tons of rock by hand using rock bars and picks. Over 1,000 lbs of powder was used to blast the debris that had covered the trail, all of which then had to be moved by crews. These crews also built hundreds of rock crib and retaining walls and hundreds of yards of resurfacing and retread. Crews came from the top end working from Gattin ranch down the trail as well as the bottom end coming up Horse Creek out of the Salmon River corridor. Additional challenges including



inclement weather and the logistics of supporting crews by pack train made for no easy task. On the last scheduled hitch, to the relief of all, the crews finally met in the middle near Mustang creek.

Completing the work would not have been possible without the skilled FS pack crews and the dedicated MCC hand crews working together towards a common goal. The trail is now open to be used by hiker's and stock users both commercial and private to hike, ride, hunt and otherwise enjoy.



Bighorn Crag Campground Stewards, Chris and Jeff McGee

The long bumpy drive into the Bighorn Crag begins on the Porphyry Creek Road near Moyer in the Panther Creek Valley on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The road is the only full-sized vehicle access into Yellow Jacket, Yellow Jacket Lake, Middle Fork Peak Lookout, Hoodo Meadows, and the Bighorn Crag Campground and Trailhead which is the ultimate destination for many visitors seeking to experience the beauty and solitude of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.



After driving up the drainage, the road forks in a saddle below Quarzite Mountain and visitors are given the option of traveling towards Yellow Jacket or the Crag Campground. For those heading into the Bighorn Crag, the rough road continues for several miles along ridges, through old fires, small valleys, and gullies with a view of the majestic Crag. After what seems like hours, you finally arrive at a small, remote campground, outfitter camp, and trailhead. After parking your vehicle, you are immediately welcomed with a big smile by the Crag Campground Stewards, Chris and Jeff McGee.

Chris and Jeff McGee, who are from Nampa, Idaho, are serving their first season as the campground stewards at the Crag Campground. Jeff, a retired Prudential Insurance Representative and Chris, a retired science teacher, have a long history of working with the Forest Service since 1999. Both have an incredible passion for recreation and wilderness. They also have a great appreciation and many relationships with Forest Service employees, conservation crews, and volunteers they have met and worked with over the last 15 years.

In 1999-2002, Chris and Jeff worked on the Sawtooth National Forest's Fairfield Ranger District conducting botanical surveys for the range management program. Every year since 1999, Jeff called the Bitterroot National Forest about volunteering at Lantz Bar on the Salmon River. In 2003-2005, the Bitterroot offered them the opportunity to work at Paradise where they assisted with the permit season on the Selway, maintained dispersed campsites, and ran a small "quasi-coffee shop" and news hub. They enjoyed the interactions with the public and Forest Service employees on the West Fork and Moose Creek Districts.

Safety Tips: Winter Driving



Drive extra carefully; slow down and leave plenty of time to get there.



Student Conservation Association Celebrates 6 years in partnership with the Salmon-Challis National Forest



Created in 2009, the SCA Idaho AmeriCorps Program is designed to meet the environmental conservation, natural resource protection, community stewardship, and workforce development needs of the larger community touched by the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

The SCA Idaho AmeriCorps program provides five-month internships to individuals serving in the Salmon-Challis National Forest region of central Idaho. Members work with Forest Service employees on a variety of conservation service projects throughout the area. During their service members gain outdoor leadership experience and multidisciplinary training in a variety of land management facets, which include studying forestry and fuel loads, rangeland management, wildlife management/biology, hydrology and watershed surveys, data collection using Trimble GPS units, and trail maintenance.

Members arrived from 9 different states in May to a snowy reception from the mountains of the Salmon-Challis. Snow in the mountains of Idaho can be quite a change of pace, especially for those members who had never seen snow before. After a month of training including wilderness first responder certifications, cross-cut saw training, and leave no trace outdoor ethics, the crew was itching to get their hands dirty and start the projects that awaited their strong backs and ambitious attitudes.

The crews work in teams of 2 to 6 members at a time and anywhere from 4-8 day schedules on all 6 ranger districts of the Salmon-Challis National Forest. South Zone trails manager Phil McNeal has been working closely with the SCA crews this year to complete a variety of maintenance projects on Swauger Lakes, Lola Creek, Mt. Borah, Lake Creek, Morse Creek, Burnt Aspen, Buster Lake, and Morgan Creek trails.

Much of the work being done this season is focused on restoration of user defined trails. Examples of this include situations where hikers and equestrian users unintentionally create new trails to get around fallen trees that block the trail, or illegal motorized use of trails originally intended for single track recreation. Armed with chainsaws, cross-cut saws, and a smattering of hand tools, SCA members have maintained or restored over 12 miles of trail and further protected nearly twice that distance from further degradation by closing many routes that were once being used illegally.

The SCA is the only national organization that develops tomorrow's conservation leaders by providing high school and college-age individuals with hands-on conservation service opportunities in all 50 states, from urban communities to national parks and forests.



Upper North Fork Healthy Forest Restoration Action Ecosystem Restoration Project

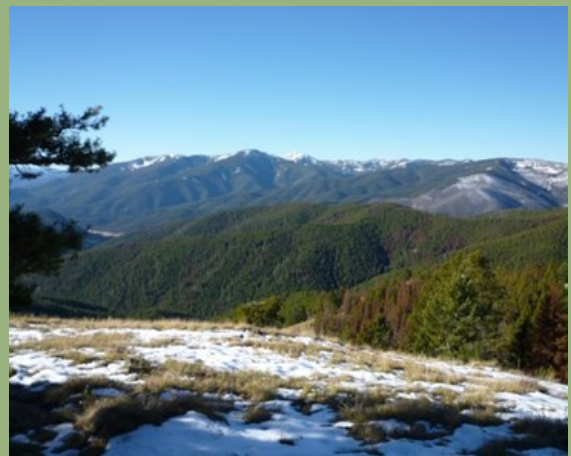


The Salmon-Challis National Forest recently completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Upper North Fork Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) Ecosystem Restoration Project which is located in the North Fork Salmon River drainage between Gibbonsville and Lost Trail Pass Ski Area on the North Fork Ranger District.

The Upper North Fork Project is a 41,000 acre integrated hazardous fuels and forest restoration project. In addition to helping to reduce hazardous fuels and restore wildlife habitat, this project will also compliment past and ongoing projects in the area. Proposed thinning and prescribed burning units located near or adjacent to past timber harvest and burning units will help to create areas where future wildfires can be safely managed while helping to protect communities. Hazardous fuels will be reduced by using both commercial and noncommercial treatments in addition to prescribed burning and managing naturally caused fires under the right conditions. Other restoration activities include decommissioning previously closed and unnecessary roads; improving meadow habitat, promoting aspen, and whitebark pine stands, improving stream habitat and removing or replacing culverts to improve fish passage in tributary streams.

The North Fork River drainage has a high frequency of lightning caused fires, and has proven to support large fast moving fires in the past such as the 341,146 acre Mustang Complex in 2012 and the 32,769 acre Saddle Complex in 2011. Fires in the past have occurred in difficult terrain which is very difficult to manage, leaving human life, personal property, and some natural resources in jeopardy.

Both the Forest Service and local partners understand the multiple benefits from these types of projects. These projects have and will continue to reduce hazardous fuels, making it safer to manage future wildfires. These projects are also promoting healthy timber stands and improving wildlife habitat. Project implementation is expected to begin in 2015.



“Intermountain Old Timers”

In September, the Salmon-Challis National Forest was proud to host the “Intermountain Old Timers” for their 2014 Annual Meeting. The Forest Service Old Timers Club was organized in 1950 to preserve the traditions of the Forest Service, to maintain contact and good fellowship among retired, former and present employees of the Forest Service, to keep alive the family feeling among Forest Service employees, and to advance the interests of the Forest Service.



The Challis-Yankee Fork Ranger District escorted the retirees back in time and provided the experience the region’s forgotten yesterday’s of the Yankee Fork Gold Dredge and the historic Ghost Town of Custer. Today, the Dredge and Custer are quiet sentinels of Idaho’s mining heritage.

About 40 “Old Timers” spent their field trip on Thursday, September 11 touring the Yankee Fork Drainage with the Rangers from the North Fork, Middle Fork, and Challis-Yankee Fork Ranger Districts. The Rangers and retirees had a great day sharing their experiences, learning from each other and getting a different perspective on similar issues faced throughout the years. Bart Gamett, South Zone Fisheries Biologist, Russ Camper (a Salmon-Challis retiree) and Greg Romero, recreation seasonal joined the trip and provided excellent talks on the Yankee Fork Restoration Project, History of the Yankee Fork Drainage, and tours of the Dredge and Custer townsites.

One of the most interesting stories shared was that from Wes Carlson, former Forest Supervisor of the Challis National Forest in the 1960’s. Wes was involved with J.R. Simplot’s donation of the Dredge to the Forest Service and provided additional information to the group.

After returning to Salmon the retirees enjoyed a dutch oven dinner from John Nelson, who later lent his auctioneering skills for their annual auction and raffle at the beautiful Sacajawea Center in Salmon. Other forest service employees and retirees from Salmon also joined the festivities for the evening including Chuck Mark, current Forest Supervisor.

Thanks to the “Old Timers” for letting the Salmon-Challis serve as the host for your annual meeting!

Submitted by: Crystal Johnston and Denise Camper



The Salmon-Challis Makes a Big Difference for Fish

The Salmon-Challis National Forest has teamed up with the Bureau of Reclamation, Trout Unlimited, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to restore fish habitat in the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River.



Large wood plays an important role in the development and maintenance of fish habitat in the Yankee Fork but over the last 150 years, activities such as timber harvest, mining, road construction, and fire suppression, have caused large wood abundance to drop far below natural levels over much of the river. This reduction in large wood has had a substantial impact on fish habitat in the stream. The Yankee Fork Large Wood Restoration project seeks to return large wood abundance to natural levels over a 7.4 mile section of the Yankee Fork by placing approximately 730 trees in the stream channel over a three year period. The project is one of the largest stream restoration projects ever implemented on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, will help restore natural processes to the stream channel and will substantially improve habitat for chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, cutthroat trout, and the other fish species in the Yankee Fork.

The first year of the project was implemented in 2014 with 340 trees being placed in the channel. Bart Gamett, a fish biologist with the Salmon-Challis National Forest and the project leader, indicated, "This is a really exciting project not only because we are restoring a large section of stream but because of the way we are doing it." The trees are being added in a manner that mimics the natural ways that trees would have entered the stream channel.

During 2014, 251 trees were placed in a manner that mimicked trees falling into the stream channel from the streamside, 46 trees were placed in a manner that mimicked trees entering the stream channel from avalanches, and 43 trees were placed in a manner that mimicked trees entering the stream channel through a debris flow.

Project personnel returned to some of the restored areas in late August and September to evaluate the effectiveness of the work. They were excited to find bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, juvenile steelhead, and juvenile chinook salmon in the new habitat created by the trees. They also found adult Chinook salmon spawning in habitat created by the newly added large wood.



Challis-Yankee Fork District Ranger Katie Wood, who oversees the management of National Forest lands in the Yankee Fork basin, stated, "We are very excited to begin implementing this important project and we are grateful to our partners for helping us with this critical restoration effort."

Regional Forester's Message



We have an outstanding, dedicated, professional workforce, committed to exceptional land management stewardship. Our public support is growing with the innumerable partners willing to work with us to restore the forests and grasslands within the Intermountain Region.

This has been an excellent year in the Intermountain Region. Some of our accomplishments include:

- Treated over 159,000 acres to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires
- Administered 1,649 Recreation sites to standard
- Maintained 7,805 miles of trails to standard
- Sold over 227,000 ccf of timber
- Improved 295 miles of stream
- Restored over 372,000 watershed acres

Thank you for all your hard work, and your commitment to the mission of the Forest Service, serving the land and serving people!

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